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SUBJECT: US PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION DISCUSSES
PRISONER REHABILITATION DURING ANNUAL T&T VISIT

¶1. SUMMARY: The U.S.-based National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice (NABCJ) partnered with the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service (TTPS) for their 5th annual training summit and cultural exchange in Trinidad and Tobago. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago funded this year's week-long program which focuses on restorative justice (loosely defined) and rehabilitation in prisons. END SUMMARY.

¶2. The U.S.-based National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice (NABCJ) began its 5th annual training summit and cultural exchange in Trinidad and Tobago on March 6. NABCJ and the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service (TTPS) have collaborated since 1998, starting with a prisoner transfer that put a Trini-American prison warden in touch with the TTPS. Beginning in 2001, NABCJ has conducted an annual training program and cultural exchange in Trinidad and Tobago with the TTPS. NABCJ has also "adopted" the Five-Rivers School and engages in informal international mentoring arrangements with T&T criminal justice practitioners.

¶3. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago (GOTT) continues to be committed to the exchanges. The GOTT fully funded this year's summit to the tune of TTD 300,000 (approximately USD 50,000). Additionally, Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security Senator Fitzgerald Hinds attended NABCJ's last annual conference in Texas in 2005 to ensure the links continue. Minister of National Security Senator Martin Joseph and Minister of State Hinds as well as Chief Justice Satnarine Sharma attended this week's opening assembly, indicating strong support for the initiative across the legislative and judicial branches of government.

¶4. This year's week-long program focuses on restorative justice and rehabilitation in prisons. (NOTE: Though "restorative justice" usually refers to administering justice so as to restore the victim, participants used the term interchangeably with rehabilitation, perhaps referring to the aim of "restoring" criminals to society as good citizens. END NOTE.) The TTPS has already made strides towards the restorative model as it implements the GOTT's Vision 2020, which aims to achieve developed status for T&T by the year 2020. Prison Commissioner John Rougier stated during his opening address that the TTPS is well on its way to reaching this goal early, by 2015. He claimed that recidivism decreased by 10 percent last year. (NOTE: Rougier did not provide any context or methodology for this figure, making it difficult to evaluate. END NOTE.) The prisons have instituted a number of educational and vocational programs, providing opportunities for inmates after they are

released, reducing the lure of crime. He noted plans to build specialized prisons, such as for juvenile females and for inmates over 60 years old, and for improved family facilities.

15. Chief Justice Sharma, though not scheduled to speak, took the opportunity to applaud Rougier's vision of prison reform. He revealed that he had assigned a high-level magistrate to work with the TTPS to improve collaboration between the prisons and the judicial system, focusing on rehabilitation. Sharma further cautioned that while discussing reform is good, implementation of reform is always the most difficult due to people's "fossilized mindsets" that make change, even change for the better, nearly impossible without a struggle. Sharma further exhorted all those present to remember that prisoners must be treated with dignity as dehumanizing inmates only serves to reinforce criminal tendencies, and that the litmus test of any society is how its members treat the least privileged.

16. COMMENT: We are pleased to see the initiative taken by the NABCJ and by the GOTT to ensure that this cooperation continues. We welcome the positive outcomes that are likely to flow from this ongoing cross-cultural interaction. END COMMENT.

AUSTIN